

PPM 625

PROVISION OF HEARING AIDS & ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES

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PURPOSE

The fiscal policies and practices required by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) have been established to help ensure that all expenditures of VR program funds are in compliance with federal and state fiscal requirements and made in a manner that is cost-effective, efficient, and accountable.

[AUTHORITY: Federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.1; 361.12]

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

625-01. Nature and Scope of Hearing Aid and Assistive Listening Device Provision

1. Hearing aids and assistive listening devices (ALDs) are provided to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of consumers who require such devices in order to participate fully in authorized vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and achieve their planned employment outcomes.

2. As required to meet a consumer's vocational rehabilitation needs, VR may assist qualified consumers with the purchase of:

A. one hearing aid (two aids if required bilaterally), including a two-year repair warranty and a one-year, one-time-only replacement warranty for a lost or destroyed aid (with the required deductible payable by the consumer to the manufacturer together with any additional dispensing fees) per aid;

B. assistive listening devices (ALDs), such as

- FM systems,
- BiCROS,

- CROS,
- wireless devices (e.g., iCOM and streamers),
- receivers,
- transmitters,
- audio shoes/boots, and
- other ALDs, with prior approval of the Manager of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS); and

C. dispensing fees include:

- a case, one pack of batteries per aid, cleaning tools and dry aid kit for hearing aids; and
- batteries for ALDs.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy; federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.13(c)(1) (i), (iv), and (2); 361.39; 361.50(a)]

625-02. Qualified Consumers

1. Applicants determined to be eligible for VR services based solely on hearing loss and eligible consumers qualifying for VR assistance for the provision of hearing aids and/or ALDs:

A. must require hearing aids and/or ALDs to achieve the planned employment outcome; AND

B. must be determined and documented to have

- a pure tone average (PTA) loss (measured at 500, 1000, 2000, and 4000 Hz) of 40dB or more in the better ear without correction AND

- an equal or greater PTA loss (measured at 500, 1000, 2000, and 4000 Hz) in the other ear without correction, AND
- an unaided speech discrimination score of less than 70%, as determined with the use of phonetically balanced (PB) word lists administered at 50dB in sound; OR

C. in lieu of meeting **all three criteria** described in paragraph 1B of this section, must

- meet **any two of the three criteria** described (having either a PTA loss of at least 40dB in both ears at 500, 1000, 2000, and 4000 Hz or an equal PTA loss of 40dB or more in only one ear together with an unaided speech discrimination score of less than 70% at 50dB in sound); **AND**
- have a secondary hearing condition (e.g., tinnitus, vertigo, auditory recruitment, phonemic regression, or progressive hearing loss), verified by an otologist, otolaryngologist, otorhinolaryngologist, or ear, nose, and throat specialist (ENT), that constitutes or results for the consumer in a substantial impediment to employment; OR
- have a hearing loss which in itself makes the consumer unable to perform the essential job functions of the planned employment outcome, as established by an Affirmation of Employee Need form completed by the employer.

2. Eligibility determinations made in accordance with paragraph 1C of this section require an approval case note entry by the Area Supervisor prior to the initiation of IPE development.

3. After the required criteria described in paragraph 1 of this section have been met and documented, VR may provide hearing aids and/or ALDs at any time they are **required** during the consumer's vocational rehabilitation, including:

A. for VR applicants during the assessment for determining eligibility and priority for services, when required for purposes of diagnostic and evaluation services, trial work experiences (TWE) and/or extended evaluation (EE); and/or

B. for eligible VR consumers, as services provided under an individualized plan for employment (IPE), when determined to be necessary for the consumer to achieve the planned employment outcome.

4. Hearing aids and/or ALDs provided for VR applicants to determine eligibility require the prior approval of the Manager of DHHS.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy; federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.1(b); 361.13(c)(1)(i), (iv), and (2); 361.39; 361.48; 361.50(a)]

625-03. Hearing Aid and ALD Provision Limitations

1. Routine Maintenance and/or Repairs

The costs of routine maintenance and/or repairs for any hearing aid or ALD, including the costs of consumables (such as replacement batteries, tubes, and ear molds) are the responsibility of the consumer (see also [PPM 452](#)).

2. Back-Up Hearing Aids and ALDs

VR will not assist consumers with the purchase of any duplicate, back-up hearing aid or ALD requested merely to serve as a contingency against loss of use of primary devices.

3. Replacement Hearing Aids and ALDs

A. VR will not assist with the replacement of any hearing aid or ALD that is stolen, lost, or damaged due to abuse or negligence.

B. In cases where negligence or abuse is not at issue, VR may assist with the costs of replacing an existing aid or ALD (including replacements for purposes of updating or upgrading) only when:

- the consumer has experienced a documented substantial change in hearing (a difference of 10dB or greater in PTAs per ear) since the date on which the last aid was purchased; OR
- the consumer's employment involves substantially new (additional or different) job functions that require a different aid or device; OR
- the hearing aid or device is required for consumer to access and participate in additional new VR services described in his or her IPE; OR
- the consumer's current job is in jeopardy unless new aids or ALDs are obtained, as established by an Affirmation of Employee Need form completed by the employer.

C. If VR assists with replacement based on any of the factors permitted in paragraph 3B, the [VR Counselor \(VRC\)](#) must document the change in the impairment or employment, the VR service(s) for which a new aid is required, or the threat of job loss in the consumer's record of services by the evidence required by each factor.

4. OSHA Ear Protection Requirements

VR will not provide hearing aids for use in the workplace if Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rules require ear protection **in the primary work environment**.

[AUTHORITY: Federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.13(c)(1)(i), (iv), and (2); 361.50(a)]

625-04. RCD and VRC Assignments and Responsibilities

A [Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf \(RCD\)](#) should be assigned to work with every consumer whose sole or primary impediment to employment is hearing loss. If an RCD is unavailable to be the assigned counselor, an RCD must act as consultant to the VR Counselor (VRC) to approve the eligibility determination and assist with the provision of any hearing aids or ALDs approved. **An RCD must order all hearing aids provided by VR.**

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy; federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.39]

625-05. VR Eligibility Assessment and Determination Requirements

1. Information Obtained from the Consumer

In addition to the standard information obtained during the assessment for determining eligibility and priority for services (see PPM 420), the RCD or VRC must obtain from the consumer, the consumer's representative, and other sources, as appropriate, information concerning:

- A. the cause and symptoms of the hearing impairment;
- B. the date of onset;
- C. specific situations and environments in which the consumer has difficulty hearing;
- D. the date(s) and provider(s) of previous hearing examinations, and their results, if available;
- E. if applicable, the make, model, and features of any hearing aids the consumer is currently using, when the consumer obtained them,

when, where, and with what frequency they are worn, and the nature of any dissatisfaction of the consumer with them; and

F. any specifically work-related problems arising from the hearing loss and use of any current aids, including the average number of hours the consumer spends communicating on the job during a typical work day and specific job responsibilities that are impacted by hearing loss.

2. Counseling and Guidance Provided During the Assessment

During the Assessment, the RCD or VRC should counsel a consumer who has a hearing loss carefully regarding:

A. the consumer's responsibilities and the possible financial obligation that might accrue to them for goods and services;

B. hearing aid contracts and dispensers;

C. VR policies regarding the definition of "hard of hearing," criteria for determining eligibility for VR services, and qualifying for the provision of hearing aids and ALDs (see in PPM chapter 200 and section 625-02.1 of this chapter); and

D. the limitations that apply to hearing aid and ALD provision, including, but not limited to, prohibited services, limitations that apply to maintenance, repair, and replacement, and VR policy regarding missed appointments ("no-shows").

3. Additional Diagnostics Required

A. After the RCD or Counselor has confirmed that the consumer's employability is impacted by hearing loss, **evaluations must be obtained from an audiologist and, if hearing aids or ALDs will be provided, a medical specialist in hearing loss (an otologist, otolaryngologist, otorhinolaryngologist, or ENT).** A general

practitioner family physician can provide diagnostics for eligibility determination purposes for consumers with long-standing hearing loss only if hearing aids will NOT be requested.

B. The purpose of the evaluations is to help the RCD or VRC:

- verify and document the presence of hearing loss, its cause and severity (mild, moderate, or significant);
- establish that the loss cannot be corrected by standard medical means; and
- determine whether hearing aids and/or ALDs are required for the consumer to achieve the planned employment outcome.

C. The physician's report must be one year old or less, and must provide a medical diagnosis, give hearing aid clearance, and prescription for the hearing aid(s) and/or ALD(s). The audiologist's report must be six months old or less, and must specify the level of amplification and particular characteristics recommended.

D. Physician and audiologist reports demonstrating that the consumer was tested within the required time limits and testing parameters and meets VR criteria for eligibility and the provision of hearing aids and ALDs can be used for both eligibility determination and ordering hearing aids without new testing. Older testing meeting VR requirements for testing parameters can be used only for eligibility determination if the testing accurately describes the current functioning of the consumer.

E. Only an RCD, VRC, or other professional employed by VR can determine VR eligibility, the impediment to employment imposed by the consumer's hearing loss, and whether VR will assist with the provision of hearing aids or ALDs.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy and federal regulations,

625-06. Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Development

As soon as possible after the diagnostic evaluations are completed and the RCD or VRC has received a [Hearing Aid Recommendation form](#) from the audiologist, the counselor and consumer must discuss the audiologist's recommendations and begin developing the consumer's IPE. The consumer should make an informed choice about which hearing aid dispenser to work with. The IPE must describe the brand of hearing aid(s) required, the hearing aid dispenser chosen by the consumer, and any agreement by the consumer to pay for any additional costs not approved by VR, as described in section 625-08 of this chapter.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy per federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.46(a)(4) and (6)(ii)(B); 361.47(a)(7); 361.50(a); 361.52]

625-07. Authorization for Purchase and Dispensing

1. Authorization of Aids from the Primary Hearing Aid List

Upon receipt of the recommendation of the audiologist and completing the IPE, the RCD can authorize the purchase and dispensing of the hearing aid. The RCD can authorize the purchase of any recommended hearing aid on the primary (pre-approved) hearing aid list.

2. Hearing Aid Waiver Request

Any hearing aid not listed on the primary hearing aid list requires a hearing aid waiver request completed by the RCD and prior approval by the Manager of DHHS. Once a waiver request is selected in IRIS, an auto-generated approval request is sent to the Manager of DHHS, who is the only person authorized to approve a waiver.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy and federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.50(e)]

625-08. Financial Obligations of Consumers

1. If a consumer desires a more advanced hearing aid than what is required to meet his or her vocational rehabilitation needs for employment approved by VR, the consumer has the right to obtain the desired aid upon signing an agreement to pay the increased costs of the advanced aid at VR's discounted price. In such instances, VR will authorize payment in full to the vendor and the consumer must then reimburse the difference to VR by cashier's check or money order at the end of the 30-day trial period and the counselor's completion of the voucher to generate payment to the manufacturer. The consumer's reimbursement to VR must be forwarded to Central Support Services by the RCD or VRC within 24 hours of receipt.

2. The consumer is also responsible for the costs of any extra dispensing fees, upgraded warranties, or other hearing aid features and services incurred as a consequence of his or her decision to obtain a more advanced hearing aid or any additional hearing aid. The consumer's agreement to be responsible for all additional costs must be documented by a signed and dated Hearing Aid Agreement form.

3. If the consumer fails to pay his or her portion of any expenses, VR can collect the hearing aid(s) from the consumer or the RCD or VRC can enter a case note noting failure to meet the reimbursement requirement.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy per federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.39]

625-09. Ordering, Dispensing, and Payment Procedures

The following procedures describe the process for purchasing and dispensing hearing aids.

1. Authorizations

A. Hearing Aid Authorizations

An RCD must authorize for hearing aids from the selected manufacturer through the Indiana Rehabilitation Information System (IRIS) and provide copies of the hearing aid authorization with a counselor completed Hearing Aid/Ear Mold Order form to the manufacturer.

B. Dispensing Authorizations

At the same time the hearing aid authorization is completed, the RCD must also authorize the dispensing fees for the selected dispenser through IRIS and provide copies of the dispensing authorization with a counselor completed Hearing Aid/Ear Mold Order form to the dispenser.

2. Submitting an Order

The RCD must use the ordering process of a selected manufacturer listed in IRIS to submit an order. When ordering, the RCD must select the appropriate hearing aid(s) with specific features and options from the list provided in IRIS.

3. Obtaining Ear Impressions

After the RCD places a hearing aid order, the dispenser must mail ear impressions to the manufacturer with a completed copy of the Hearing Aid/Ear Mold Order form.

4. Manufacture and Shipment of Aids

After the manufacturer has received the authorization, order, and ear impression(s) with a completed copy of the Hearing Aid/Ear Mold Order form, the hearing aids will be built. The finished hearing aids will be

shipped to the dispenser with the manufacturer's shipping invoice and the manufacturer's order invoice will be sent to the RCD.

5. Processing of the Manufacturer's Claim

Once the dispenser has notified the RCD that the hearing aids have been received, the RCD will process the claim to generate payment to the manufacturer per the contract requirements. **Payment to the dispenser cannot be processed prior to processing the manufacturer's claim.**

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy per federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.39]

625-10. Dispensing Fees

1. VR will pay the applicable contracted fees for unilateral and binaural analog, unilateral and binaural digital, CROS and BiCROS systems (at the binaural digital rate), and FM systems specified by the approved dispenser agreement.

2. The RCD can process the dispenser's claim for payment after the counselor receives the signed Approval to Dispense and a Real Ear Assessment or Aided Audiogram. Dispensing fees approved and paid by VR must include the costs of:

A. creation of the ear impression(s) and sending it/them to the manufacturer;

B. the taking, ordering, sending, receiving, and adjusting of ear impressions/molds and/or hearing aids;

C. setting (analog) or programming (digital) the device(s);

D. fitting the device(s);

E. a Real Ear Measure or Aided Audiogram, taken at the day of fitting or at a subsequent follow-up visit within 15 business days of the day of fitting;

F. patient education and training for the use and maintenance of the device;

G. a maximum of four (4) follow-up visits (which should be conducted over the first 90 days after initial dispensing); and

H. one case, one packet of batteries per aid, a cleaning tool, and a dry aid kit.

[AUTHORITY: State agency policy; federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.13(c); 361.39; 361.50(a)]

625-11. Case Closure Requirements

The RCD or VRC may proceed with closing the consumer's record of services after confirming that the consumer has received the hearing aid(s) or ALD(s) and is satisfied with them, and has met all case closure requirements described in PPM chapter [480](#) regarding successful case closures.

[AUTHORITY: Federal regulations, 34 CFR 361.47; 361.361.56]